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THE

CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Ólóir do Dhia an rna hárduib, agur ríoscaí an ótalam deagóil do na dáoim.

LUKE ii. 14.

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THE LIFE OF A REFORMER.

WHEN we have, from time to time, undertaken in these pages to give an account of the life of a reformer, we have been aware that our sketch has been likely to be read with different feelings by different classes of our readers. We know that our Roman Catholic friends have the worst opinion of many of those whom we reverence as reformers, and that they regard their so-called reforms as, in reality, changes subversive of right order and of true doctrine. We are disposed, then, for once, to give the life of a reformer about whose merits all parties can agree—namely, Galileo Galilei. Whatever may have been ignorantly believed in former times, we do not suppose that there are any Roman Catholics who imagine now that their religion requires them to believe that the earth is stationary in the centre of the universe, the sun and all the planets revolving round it. Whether Galileo put forward his views with discretion, and with due regard to ecclesiastical authority, are points which we shall consider afterwards; but even those who think the least favourably of him in this respect must own his great merits as one of the main agents in a wonderful revolution of human opinion. We observe, accordingly, in a late number of a contemporary Roman Catholic periodical, *The Lamp*, a laudatory article on Galileo, containing an interesting sketch of his life, founded, like our own, on the valuable life of this philosopher published in the Library of Useful Knowledge.

Now that the doctrines taught by Galileo have become the established creed of philosophers, and form part of the lessons given to every schoolboy, it requires an effort to understand the greatness of the difficulties with which he had to contend and over which he triumphed. When Galileo began to teach, it was the established opinion of all philosophers, with some insignificant exceptions, that the earth was immovable in the centre of the universe, and that the sun, moon, and planets, and other stars, were fixed in separate orbs of transparent solid matter, all of which were carried round the earth by a common motion every twenty-four hours; besides which, each orb had an independent motion of its own. This doctrine was the almost universal opinion of the time; it was commanded by the authority of the most distinguished philosophers and the most eminent astronomers of former ages; it was consistent with common sense, for every one was ready to assert that he had the evidence of his senses that the earth was at rest, and that any one who maintained that it was in rapid motion said what his own eyes might show him to be false. And, lastly, it was commanded by the sanction of religion; for those passages of the Bible which adopt the popular language on the subject, and which it is now universally owned were not intended to communicate astronomical knowledge—passages such as, “He hath made the round world so fast that it cannot be moved;” “The sun cometh forth as a bridegroom from his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. It goeth forth from the uttermost part of heaven, and runneth about unto the end of it again”—these passages, and others of the same kind, were regarded as only capable of receiving the most literal interpretation, and as proving decisively that the doctrine that the earth was in motion and the sun at rest were expressly contradicted by divine revelation. And yet, common sense, the evidence of men's senses, the authority of distinguished philosophers, the supposed testimony of scripture, and the authority of the Church, have all opposed in vain, and the paradoxes maintained by Galileo have

been elevated to the rank from which they can never be deposed, of established truths of science. The history of such a revolution of opinion as this affords us a striking proof of how little value are the arguments by which it is often attempted to prevent any reformers from even getting a hearing. It is of no purpose to ask the reformer, Do you pretend that all the rest of the world are wrong, and that you alone are in the right? Are you wiser than all the great men who have lived and been honoured before you? Must we look on them as simpletons and idiots? Questions like these are often addressed to the putters forth of strange doctrine, and seem well calculated to reduce them to silence if they have any modesty at all. And, yet, we see from this history that it is quite possible that the reformer may be in the right, and all the rest of the world in the wrong; and we learn to be cautious how we refuse a hearing even to what is most opposed to our prejudices, since it may happen to us to find truth where we least expect it.

It would take up far more space than we could feel ourselves justified in giving up to it, if we were to attempt to give a history of all the scientific discoveries which have made Galileo illustrious, and we shall, therefore, as far as possible, confine our sketch of his life to his share in the great controversy concerning the motion of the earth, in which his name occupies so prominent a figure. Galileo was born at Pisa on the 15th February, 1564, of a noble but impoverished family. He was destined by his father to the medical profession; but having been accidentally induced to receive a little instruction in mathematics, his predilection for these new studies became so irresistible that his father found it impossible to draw him from them; and he obtained so much eminence for his scientific attainments that he was appointed lecturer in mathematics in the university of Pisa when in the twenty-sixth year of his age. In this post he soon became distinguished for his resolution to inquire into the phenomena of nature for himself, and not, like most other philosophers of the day, to acquiesce without examination in every assertion of Aristotle, who was then regarded as an authority from which there was no appeal.

It is not quite ascertained at what period Galileo embraced the theory of astronomy to which he afterwards gave such powerful confirmation. The idea that the apparent motion of the heavenly bodies might be caused by a real motion of the earth had occurred to more than one ancient philosopher. In more modern times the theory was revived by Copernicus, a native of Thorn, in Prussia, who, however, foreseeing the opposition this doctrine was likely to meet with, kept his work unpublished for forty years, and only brought it out in time to receive the first copy a few hours before his death. Copernicus was unable to adduce by any means as strong arguments in support of his system as have been discovered in later times. He was chiefly influenced by the extreme complexity of the motions which in previous systems it was found necessary to attribute to the heavenly bodies in order to explain the observed appearances, and by the greater simplicity with which these appearances could be accounted for if it were supposed that they were in part occasioned by a real motion of the earth. Opposed as these views were to popular opinion, they made converts, and were gradually and silently gaining ground. The following extract from one of Galileo's dialogues, though put into the mouth of a fictitious character, seems evidently intended to give an account of his own conversion to the new creed, and of the arguments by which he was persuaded:—

“Being very young, and having scarcely finished my course of philosophy, which I left off as being set upon other employments, there chanced to come into those parts a certain foreigner of Rostock, whose name, as I remember, was Christianus Ursitius, a follower of Copernicus, who in an academy gave two or three lectures on this point, to whom many flocked as auditors. But I, thinking they went more for the novelty of the subject than otherwise, did not go to hear him; for I had concluded with myself that that opinion could be no other than a *solemn madness*. And questioning some of those who had been there I perceived they all made a jest thereof, except one, who told me that the business was not altogether to be laughed at; and because the man was reputed by me to be

very intelligent and wary, I repented that I was not there, and began from that time forward, as oft as I met with any one of the Copernican persuasion, to demand of them if they had been always of the same judgment. Of as many as I examined I found not so much as one who told me not that he had been a long time of the contrary opinion, but to have changed it for this, as convinced by the strength of the reasons proving the same. And afterwards questioning them one by one to see whether they were well possessed of the reasons of the other side, I found them all to be very ready and perfect in them, so that I could not truly say that they took this opinion out of ignorance, vanity, or to show the acuteness of their wits. On the contrary, of as many of the Peripatetics and Ptoleymans as I have asked (and out of curiosity I have talked with many) what pains they had taken in the book of Copernicus, I found very few that had so much as superficially perused it; but of those who I thought had *understood* the same, not one. And, moreover, I had inquired among the followers of the Peripatetic doctrine if ever any of them had held the contrary opinion, and likewise found none that had. Whereupon, considering that there was no man who followed the opinion of Copernicus that had not been first on the contrary side, and that was not very well acquainted with the reasons of Aristotle and Ptolemy; and, on the contrary, that there was not one of the followers of Ptolemy that had ever been of the judgment of Copernicus, and had left that to embrace this of Aristotle—considering, I say, these things, I began to think that one who leaveth an opinion imbibed with his milk and followed by very many to take up another owned by very few, and denied by all the schools, and that really seems a great paradox, must needs have been moved, not to say forced, by many powerful reasons. For this cause, I am become very curious to dive into the bottom of this business.”

We have thought it worth while to copy this long extract because of the very philosophical views which it embodies. Ordinary men are apt to be strongly prejudiced in favour of the *old* doctrines which have commanded the assent of the great men of former days, and which continue to be adhered to by the majority at present; and they do not think it worth while to give a hearing to opinions held only by a few, and removed from vulgar notions; but here we see that a true philosopher felt that the opinions held only by a few reformers had, in reality, the strongest claims to examination. The very fact that they had *changed* their opinions gave them a strong claim to be heard. These reformers knew what was to be said on both sides of the question. They had not lazily adopted the doctrines they had received from their instructors without inquiring to what objections these doctrines were liable, but had embraced opinions contrary to vulgar notions and exposed to strong opposition, and it was not to be supposed that they would do so without some very good reasons. We cannot help stopping to ask our readers whether it is not possible that the same principles may not hold good in other subjects too? We have seen several maintain that the question is decided at once against Luther, Melanchthon, and the rest of them, by the mere fact that they were *innovators*, and were putting forward views at variance with those held by the great body of Christians in their times. To one who looks at the question rightly, this is just a reason why their doctrines are entitled to a very serious examination. If they had been lazy, uninquiring men, they would have continued to believe as their fathers had believed before them—they would have swallowed everything indiscriminately. The fact that after studying both sides they changed their opinions—that they gave up opinions which had all the weight of authority to command them, and adopted others which could have no recommendation at all, unless it were the force of truth which compelled them to receive them—this fact is one which ought to induce a candid person to give a very serious consideration to the arguments by which they professed to have been influenced.

To return to the history of Galileo. We come to relate the discovery which has made him most famous—that of the telescope, in the year 1609; and the application of the telescope to the study of the heavenly bodies. Galileo cannot claim to be the first who looked through a telescope. The invention is said to have been made by accident in the shop of a Dutch optician, who, happening

to look through two spectacle glasses, separated by a suitable distance from each other, found that distant objects appeared larger and more distinct. It appears to have been some time before the importance of the discovery was appreciated; and the instrument was set up in the optician's shop as a curious philosophical toy, showing a large and inverted image of a weathercock, towards which it was directed. The rumour reached Galileo (in Venice at the time) that an instrument had been invented by which distant objects could be made to seem nearer than their true distance. He immediately set himself to consider the means by which such a result could be brought about, and his investigations were rewarded by the discovery of a telescope, of a different construction, however, from that which had been used in Holland. The interest excited by the discovery was unbounded. For more than a month Galileo's whole time was taken up in exhibiting his instrument to the principal inhabitants of Venice; and for some time after, the fortunate possessor of a telescope found it vain to hope to use his wonderful instrument without molestation. A crowd of idlers would gather round him, insist on taking possession of the telescope, hand it from one to the other, and detain him for some hours until their curiosity was satiated.

Galileo's first application of his instrument to the heavenly bodies was the study of the beautiful appearance presented by the varied surface of the moon. He next turned his attention to the planet Jupiter. The first evening he observed it he took notice of three small stars which seemed nearly in a line with the planet, and whose position he took notice of, since the manner in which the motion of the planets is studied is by comparing their position with that of the neighbouring fixed stars. The next night he looked again, and found that Jupiter had passed to the east of two of them, which had been on the other side of the planet the night before. But here was a puzzle. Jupiter, according to the tables, ought, at this time, to be going towards the west, and not towards the east. How was this to be accounted for? When next he was able to observe them, he found them in a new position, and a fourth small star had made its appearance. Night after night these small stars continued close to Jupiter, in varying positions, however Jupiter changed his place among the fixed stars. The conclusion could not be resisted that the movement which he first supposed had been made by Jupiter had, in reality, been made by these stars, and that they could be nothing less than four moons revolving about Jupiter, in the same manner in which the earth is accompanied by its single attendant.

This single discovery put the controversy concerning the true system of the universe in quite a new position. The old theory was that stars and planets all went round the earth. Here were clear exceptions, as these four newly discovered stars unquestionably made their revolutions, not round the earth, but round Jupiter. The sight of this planet, attended by its four satellites, was alone sufficient to shake the confidence of astronomers in their belief that the earth was the most important body in the universe; while the spectacle of these bodies performing, in perfect order, their revolutions round one central body could not but suggest an analogy revealing the true relation of the planets to the sun.

When Galileo first announced to the world his discovery of these four new planets, it is difficult to describe the sensation which its publication produced. Many doubted, many positively refused to believe so novel an announcement; all were struck with the greatest astonishment (according to their respective opinions), either at the new view of the universe thus offered to them, or at the daring audacity of Galileo in inventing such fables.

The sensation caused by the news may be illustrated by an extract from a letter of Kepler, illustrious for his own astronomical discoveries:—“I was sitting idle at home, thinking of you, most excellent Galileo, and your letters, when the news was brought to me of the discovery of four new planets by the help of the double eye-glass. Wachsenfeld stopped his carriage at my door to tell me, when such a fit of wonder seized me at a report which seemed so very absurd, and I was thrown into such agitation at seeing an old dispute between us decided in this way, that, besides his joy, my colouring, and the laughter of both, confounded as we were by such a novelty, we were hardly capable, he of speaking, or I of listening.”

One reason why the report seemed so very absurd was, that many at that time had persuaded themselves not merely that there were only seven planets (including the sun and moon), but that there neither could nor ought to be any more. A Florentine astronomer writes, that since animals have seven apertures in the head (namely, two nostrils, two eyes, two ears, and a mouth), since there are only seven months, seven days in the week, and so forth, there could not possibly be more than seven planets. Galileo quietly replied, that these might have been good reasons for believing, beforehand, that no more planets could be discovered; but that they were hardly of sufficient weight to destroy the new ones when they had been actually seen.

Another astronomer writes about Galileo's pretended discovery.—

“These are the dreams of idle men, who love ludicrous ideas better than our laborious and industrious correction

of the heavens. Nature abhors so horrible a chaos; and to the truly wise such vanity is detestable.”

Others refused to believe in the new planets until Galileo could show what astrological influence they had on the fortunes and characters of individuals. Galileo sarcastically advised them to compare all their past predictions with the events. If they found perfect agreement, then they might prophesy merrily on, for the new planets could not, in any degree, affect the things which were already past, and they might hope to be no less fortunate conjurors in future; but if they found the events to differ, in some trifling particulars, from their predictions, then they might attribute the difference, if they pleased, to those new planets, and might set to work to form tables, and ascertain, by observation, the variety of influences depending on them.

The principal professor of Padua pertinaciously refused all Galileo's invitations to look at the heavens through his glass, and a German named Horky published a book strenuously denying the existence of the new planets, and asserting positively that he had himself looked at the heavens through Galileo's glass, and knew for a certainty that no such thing as a satellite of Jupiter exists. The conclusion of the story is amusing. Kepler, with whom this work was intended to find favour, received its author with a burst of indignation, and did not receive him back into his good graces, except on the condition “that I [Kepler] am to show him Jupiter's satellites, AND HE IS TO SEE THEM, and own that they are there.”

At length, when the existence of these new satellites could be no longer denied, quite an opposite complaint was made, that Galileo had understated their number. One astronomer counted five, another nine, while others carried the number up to twelve. But a short time proved that it was unsafe to exceed as to fall short of the number that Galileo had fixed on; for Jupiter rapidly removed himself from the neighbourhood of the fixed stars, which had given rise to these pretended discoveries, carrying with him none but his four original attendants.

Galileo went on to make other interesting discoveries on the other planets. The only one which we shall delay to record here is his discovery of the phases of Venus. When the theory was first put forward that the planets are opaque bodies, which only shine by the reflected light of the sun, it was objected that if this were the case Venus ought to present the same phases as the moon, changing from full face to a crescent, according as it approached or receded from the sun. Copernicus made a very unsuccessful attempt to explain this difficulty, but Galileo, on directing his telescope to Venus, found that she actually did go through these changes, the non-observance of which by the naked eye had been considered a fatal objection to the Copernican system. It does not seem a difficult matter for Galileo merely to report the result of his observations on the heavens; but it is hard to estimate properly the amount of courage which was required to do so at the time. Galileo had to face a powerful party, which, when invited to look on an object in the heavens which Aristotle had never suspected, immediately refused all credence to those senses to which at other times they so confidently appealed. Plagiarist! liar! impostor! heretic! were the malignant exclamations by which the poor philosopher was unsparingly assailed. In one of his letters he expresses strongly the hopelessness of convincing people who were resolved not to be convinced. “You almost make me laugh by saying that those clear observations are sufficient to convince the most obstinate. It seems that you have yet to learn that, long ago, the observations were capable of convincing those who were capable of reasoning, and those who wish to learn the truth; but that to convince the obstinate, and those who care for nothing beyond the vain applause of the stupid and senseless vulgar, not even the testimony of the stars could suffice, were they to descend on earth to speak for themselves. Let us, then, endeavour to procure some knowledge for ourselves, and rest contented with this sole satisfaction; but of advancing in popular opinion, or gaining the assent of the book philosophers, let us abandon both the hope and the desire.”

With this quotation we conclude for the present our account of Galileo's discoveries, which we found could not conveniently be compressed within the limits of a single article.

(To be continued.)

AURICULAR CONFESSION.

In our numbers for July and August last we showed that the form of absolution, “Ego absolvō te,” was never used in the Church of Rome itself until the thirteenth century.

Our clever correspondent, Mr. Rourke, has written to us a letter upon these articles (which we published in our last number), but he has not attempted to deny or to question the great fact; and we think no intelligent Roman Catholic will now attempt to deny it.

Our readers will, probably, like to know what was the doctrine and practice of the Church of Rome about “confession” during those ages when the priests of the Church of Rome were not yet permitted to forgive sin, but only to pray to God that He would forgive it. We, therefore, now proceed to show what was the doctrine and practice of the Church of Rome about confession and contrition, previous to the thirteenth century.

We will first show the doctrine of confession as settled by the Council of Trent, to wit the form, “Ego absolvō te.”

“The holy synod moreover teaches that the form of the sacrament of penance, in which chiefly its force is situated, is placed in those words of the minister, ‘I absolve thee.’ But the matter, as it were, of this sacrament, is the acts of the penitent himself—to wit, contrition, confession, and satisfaction, which things in the penitent, inasmuch as they are required by the institution of God, for the integrity of the sacrament and the full and perfect remission of sins, for this reason they are called parts of penance.”

With respect to the great question whether sins can be forgiven by God upon contrition only, without confession, the Council of Trent says: “Although it may happen that this contrition be sometimes perfected by charity, and reconcile a man to God, before this sacrament be actually received, nevertheless that reconciliation is not to be ascribed to that contrition, without the desire for the sacrament, which is included in it.”

And the general question is thus summed up by the Council: “It is necessary to seek from God the pardon even of all sins, by open and modest confession.”

We now proceed to show what the doctrine of the Church of Rome about the necessity of confession was, in the twelfth century, before priests had undertaken to say, “I absolve thee.”

For this purpose we are fortunate in having a treatise on penitence, written in the twelfth century (about A.D. 1151) by a Benedictine monk, Gratian, the famous author of the *Decretum*, a book which at once became the standard of ecclesiastical law in all Western Europe.

We have often had to complain of the “Decretum” for the forgeries and the novelties it adopted, and also to praise it for the good old doctrine and maxims which it retained from the early ages.

Gratian's treatise on penitence is superior to anything else he wrote, alike in its arrangement and in force of expression, and comprehension of the subject.

Gratian probably wrote this treatise before he published the *Decretum*; he then inserted the treatise in the *Decretum*, in which it forms the answer to the third “QUESTION” under Cause xxxiii.

This treatise thus formed part of that book which at once became the standard of canon law in the Church of Rome. No higher authority could be found to show what was then the doctrine of the Church of Rome about confession.

Gratian takes the same prudent course in this treatise which he takes in a great many other questions. He found the Church of Rome not having any law which required confession to a priest as necessary. He found one large party in the Church maintaining that confession was wholly unnecessary to the forgiveness of sin. He found another large party maintaining that confession was necessary in order to obtain forgiveness of sin: the Church of Rome not thinking it necessary, or else not thinking it safe, to decide between them, and, therefore, allowing each party to support their own opinion, just as the Church of Rome did afterwards about the Immaculate Conception. In this case, Gratian had more prudence than to express any opinion of his own in the treatise. He states the opinions of each party, and also the authorities and arguments by which those opinions were maintained. This he does with an ability and clearness greatly superior to the rest of his work; he then leaves the question to the judgment of the reader, giving no opinion of his own, and thus confessing that the Church of Rome had then no judgment formed in the matter.

On this treatise, thus inserted in the canon law, the matter seems to have rested for sixty-four years, until confession was at last enforced by the third Council of Lateran, A.D. 1215.

Gratian gives first the authorities and arguments of that great party in the Church of Rome who then thought themselves at liberty (as they really were) to hold in the Church of Rome herself that confession to a priest was wholly unnecessary for the forgiveness of sin. “We will try and give an abstract of his statement of their argument. It is contained in the first part of the treatise on penitence, called “Distinction I.”

Gratian thus states the question:—“Whether by confession of heart alone, and secret satisfaction, without confession of the mouth, any one can satisfy God. For there are those who say that any one who ever may obtain pardon of crime without confession made to the Church, and without the judgment of the priest, according to that of Ambrose upon Luke, at chapter 22.

Chapter 1.

“Peter grieved and wept, because he erred, like a man.

* Dicit praeceptor: Sancta Synodus, sacramentum Punitientia formam, in qua precepimus fratres vis sita est, in illis ministri verbis possumus esse. Ego te absolvō; &c. Sunt autem quasi materia hujus sacramentorum ipsius possestis actus, nempe contrito, confessio, et satisfactio. Quis quatenus in penitente ad integratissimum sacramentum, ad punitientiam et periculatum peccatorum remissionem ex Dei institutione recognovit, haec rationes Punitientiam partis dicuntur.—Council of Trent, Session xiv., c. 3.

* Et confessio haec aliquid charitate perfectam esse contingeret, hominemque Hes recognosset, primumque huc sacramentum suus easceplatur; ipsius ministrorum redemptionsem ipsi contritum, sic sacramentum voto, quod in illis includitur, non esse adserendum.—Council of Trent, Session xiv., c. 4.

* Necesse est, omnium enim veniam, utm aperiti et verentes confessio, a Deo quadrat.—Council of Trent, Session xiv., c. 5.

* Tractatus de Punitientia. Decret. Caus. xxixii., qu. 3.